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**ASSEMBLY HEALTH COMMITTEE DEMOCRATS CALL FOR PUBLIC HEARING ON  
ELIZABETHKINGIA OUTBREAK**

**(MADISON)** – The Democrats on the Assembly Health Committee have called on committee chair Rep. Joe Sanfelippo to hold a public hearing on the Elizabethkingia anopheles outbreak in Wisconsin.

Elizabethkingia is a bacterial infection that can prove fatal for people who already have illnesses or compromised immune systems. It has been linked to 18 deaths in Wisconsin since January, mainly in southeastern Wisconsin.

“I am concerned about the effectiveness and timeliness of communications between local health care providers, local labs, county health departments and the state,” said Rep. Debra Kolste (D-Janesville). “Only after several cases of Elizabethkingia were received by the state late last year and in early January did we learn that we have had other cases dating back to November of 2015.”

The older cases were quickly identified only after the Department of Health Services (DHS) and the Division of Public Health (DPH) sent information on identifying cases to health care workers in mid-January.

“Accurate and timely information is critical in controlling outbreaks such as this, because there is a known antibiotic cure for this strain of Elizabethkingia,” Kolste said. “Front line health care workers need better guidance from the state to treat patients and prevent deaths before it is too late.”

“With the threat of Zika virus looming, we must establish effective communications between providers and the state health agencies,” Kolste said. “We must be able to quickly diagnose bacterial and viral infections that could lead to widespread outbreaks.”

“The purpose of the hearing is to have the Department of Health Services demonstrate what steps are being taken to improve this communication structure and how the department is preparing for Zika as the summer months approach,” Kolste said.

The outbreak of Elizabethkingia anopheles in Wisconsin is the largest ever documented in the United States and the source of the outbreak has still not been identified. DPH has reported 60 confirmed cases of Elizabethkingia anopheles as of Tuesday this week.

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